

Ethi-Reasoning

Objectives

Students will (1) examine their own values and beliefs related to wildlife and other elements of the environment, (2) listen to and respect the rights of others to maintain different values and beliefs, and (3) evaluate possible actions they might take that have an effect on wildlife and the environment.

Method

Students read, discuss, make assessments, and write about hypothetical dilemmas concerning wildlife, natural resources, or both.

Correlations

Language Arts: Reading 2.4; Listening and Speaking 1.1; Speaking 2.1 a *History:* 4.5-4
Science: Life Science 3 a, b, c; Investigation 6 a, c

Materials

One set of Dilemma Cards for each group of students

Background

This activity is designed to give students the opportunity to examine their own values and beliefs relating to wildlife and other elements of the environment. It is not the intent of this activity to prescribe “right” and “wrong” answers for the students. One exception is in the areas where information about laws is conveyed.

Variation in laws from state to state affect wildlife and the environment. Each state has an official public agency that is legally responsible for managing the wildlife within the state. This agency can be contacted in your state to request general information about laws that affect most wildlife in your area. For example, it is legal to hunt and fish for some animals in all states. However, which animals can be hunted and under what conditions are specified by laws and regulations for which the state wildlife agency is responsible. There are also federal regulations that affect wildlife. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service can be contacted for information about such laws. For example, federal law protects all birds of prey

(eagles, hawks, and owls) from being hunted or any intentional cause of death, injury, or harassment. All threatened and endangered species are protected by law. It is against the law to intentionally harm songbirds. It is generally illegal to possess birds’ nests, eggs, and feathers, even those found lying on the ground. It is often against the law to pick up the carcass of an animal that has been killed by a vehicle along the highway or road. Instead, local wildlife authorities should be notified. In many cases, it is against the law to take an injured wild animal home to care for it. For example, birds of prey cannot be cared for by private citizens unless those citizens have a permit to do so. There are many laws, and they are complex. Again, it is useful and important to contact local authorities about the laws protecting and affecting wildlife in your area.

Whether right or wrong, questions of law can be separated from questions of ethics. On a personal level, an individual’s choice of values and behaviors may be described as a code of ethics. Hunting, for example, is controversial for some people from an ethical point of view. Some people say that although hunting is legal, it is unethical because a human being is taking the life of a wild animal. Others believe hunting to be a responsible and ethical form of recreation, acquiring food, or controlling an animal population. These differences of belief may be sincerely held. Whether or not a person chooses to hunt is a personal choice dictated by one’s personal ethics. Conflicts arise, however, when a person motivated by one set of ethics tries to force his or her ethics on others (i.e. arguments, harassment, or legislative action).

Procedure

Before the Activity

Educators will need to copy and cut out the Dilemma Cards. Other dilemmas could be written that are more specific to regional issues. Students could also be involved in the process of creating the dilemma cards, with each student responsible for one card. Dilemmas can be left entirely open-ended, with no options suggested.

1. Divide the class into groups of four and give each group a stack of Dilemma Cards. Place them face down at the center of the group.
2. The first student draws a card from the top of the stack. The student studies the situation, decides what he or she should do, and formulates a response.
3. When the students are ready, typically in less than 2 minutes, they each read the situation and options aloud to the rest of the group. Then, they give their decision and describe the reasoning involved. In turn, the other members of the group are invited to comment on the dilemma and what they would do in the situation. Discuss each dilemma for about 5 minutes. Make sure the person whose dilemma is being discussed has an opportunity to ask questions of the other members of the group and to offer clarification about his or her decision. Discussion gives the students experience in having ideas examined by peers and is intended to remind the students of the need to take personal responsibility for decision making. It is not necessary, and may not be desirable, for the students to reach a consensus; there are legitimately ranging views of the most appropriate and responsible actions to take in many situations. The purpose is to provide students with an opportunity to examine, express, clarify, and take responsibility for their reasoning.
4. Return the card to the bottom of the stack, and have the next student select a card from the top of the stack. Continue this process until all students have had the opportunity to express their decision and rationale about a dilemma.

Evaluation

Choose a dilemma and:

- Write a short paragraph on the positive and negative effects of all the options listed for that dilemma.
- Indicate what additional information, if any, is needed to make a responsible and informed decision.
- Give two opposing and convincing arguments on how to respond to this dilemma.
- Identify what response is the most responsible; explain your reasoning.
- Explain how someone else could reach a different, yet valid opinion with the same information.

Activity adapted from *Project WILD K-12 Curriculum and Activity Guide*, copyright Council for Environmental Education. For more information about Project WILD or other CEE materials contact Bobbie Winn at the California Department of Fish and Game (888) 945-3334 or bwinn@dfg.ca.gov. Also, contact Adrienne Forbes at the Nevada Department of Wildlife (775) 334-3808 or aforbes@ndow.org. Dilemma Cards adapted from *The Florida Black Bear Curriculum Guide*, copyright Defenders of Wildlife and the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission.

Dilemma Card #1

Near your neighborhood is a large tract of wooded land. This land provides habitat for bears and many other types of wildlife. Your growing town has so many families with children that building a new, state of the art Sports Park for the community has been proposed. The park would contain playing fields, a playground for kids, and a water park. To build this new recreation area for the people of the community, the large wooded tract of land would have to be cleared. This would mean a large loss of wildlife habitat. Would you...

- a) Be in favor of the building of the Sports Park?
- b) Look for a different way to meet the needs of the people in your community and meet the needs of the wildlife?
- c) Tell everyone that there is really no need of the Sports Park. There are already many things to do like hiking and fishing?
- d) Do something else?

Dilemma Card #2

It is dark and you and your family are driving home. As you come around the curve in the road, a large black shape runs out into the road. Your family's car hits the animal. You realize that it is a black bear. The bear is now lying by the side of the road. Would you...

- a) Keep on going and hope no one saw what happened?
- b) Tell your parents to stop and check to see if the bear is still alive?
- c) Call the police to report the accident and ask for help for the bear?
- d) Make an anonymous call to a Game Warden letting them know where the bear is located?
- e) Do something else?

Dilemma Card #3

Your class is on a field trip to the zoo. Although you know that feeding of the animals by zoo visitors is prohibited, some of your friends are feeding marshmallows to the bears. Would you...

- a) Tell them that feeding marshmallows may harm the bears and ask them to stop?
- b) Report their behavior to the nearest zoo keeper?
- c) Ask the teacher to ask them to stop?
- d) Do nothing?
- e) Do something else?

Dilemma Card #4

Several people in your neighborhood have reported sightings of bears in the woods around your town. People like to watch the bears so they decide to set up a bear feeding area so they can watch the bears feed at night. They decide to gather all the food garbage and leave it out in an open area on the edge of the woods. Would you...

- a) Come to watch the bears regularly and even take pictures?
- b) Call a Game Warden or Wildlife Biologists and ask them to talk your neighbors out of the idea of a bear feeding station?
- c) Educate people in your neighborhood about the dangers to both bears and humans when bears begin to depend on people for food?
- d) Try to set up your own bear feeding station in your own backyard?
- e) Do something else?

NOTE: It is illegal in California and strongly discouraged in Nevada to feed bears. Many communities have ordinances penalizing those who feed wild animals.

Dilemma Card #5

You are on a picnic with your family and you see another family leaving to go home without picking up their own trash. It is clear the other family is going to leave litter all around. Would you...

- a) Move quickly and ask them to pick up their trash before leaving?
- b) Wait for them to leave and pick up the trash for them?
- c) Do nothing?
- d) Do something else?

Dilemma Card #6

Your backyard is surrounded by woods. One day when you and your friends are playing in your backyard, you hear a funny sound coming from a pine tree. You look at the tree and see a small black bear up in the tree. Would you...

- a) Throw rocks at the bear to try to get it to come down?
- b) Try to climb up into the tree to play with the bear?
- c) Call a television station and report the bear so you and your friends can be on the local news?
- d) Leave the bear alone and call a Game Warden or Wildlife Biologist to assist you.
- e) Do something else?

Dilemma Card #7

You and your family decide to go to a nearby state park for a bike ride. As you are riding down the bike trail you hear a rustling in the bushes next to the trail. Suddenly, a mother black bear and her cub walk out of the bushes onto the bike path. Would you...

- a) Try to pet the cute baby bear cub?
- b) Scream and try to ride your bike in the other direction?
- c) Stop and stand very still and let the mother bear and her cub cross the path?
- d) Try to keep on riding toward the bear and her cub?
- e) Do something else?

Dilemma Card #8

You live in a rural area and your family has a small barn with chickens, turkeys, goats and rabbits. One night, you are awakened by the noise of something raiding the animal food bins in your barn. You investigate and see that a black bear is raiding the grain and corn stored in the barn. Would you...

- a) Call a Game Warden to come and remove the bear?
- b) Ask your parents to shoot the bear?
- c) Try to make loud noises to scare the bear away and secure food in a bear-proof container?
- d) Set a trap to catch the bear alive and then get help to take it somewhere else to release it?
- e) Do something else?

Dilemma Card #9

You and your family take a summer camping trip. There are signs posted in the campgrounds warning campers that black bears are in the area. Barbequed hamburgers are prepared for dinner. After eating, you are all tired, and your mom decides to leave the dinner dishes out on the table and clean them up in the morning. Would you...

- a) Pick up the leftover food and any food trash and hang it from a tree far away from your campsite?
- b) Tell your mom about the dangers of leaving food out in a campsite in bear country and offer to clean up the dishes yourself?
- c) Go to bed because you are really tired too?
- d) Find a forest ranger and ask them to talk to your parents about the importance of keeping a clean campsite in bear country?
- e) Do something else?

Dilemma Card #10

You and your friends are out walking in the woods near your house. You come upon a small black bear cub. There is no sign of the cub's mother. Would you...

- a) Leave the cub where it is?
- b) Move the cub to a sheltered area?
- c) Take the cub home?
- d) Do something else?